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ABSTRACT

Rural communities of less than 2,500 residents in Illinois showed a reversal of growth patterns between 1950-80. During the 1950's Illinois' approximately 900 rural towns grew at a rate of 60% compared with 81-86% growth rate for towns in other size classes; during the 1970's rural towns showed a steady growth increase of 73% while growth of towns of more than 10,000 residents was sharply reduced to 40-51%. Proximity to metropolitan centers and access to interstate highways were vital to rural community growth in the 1950's and 1960's, with proximity to a metropolitan area the more important factor. By the 1970's these factors played a less significant role and in recent years rural community growth has taken place independently of location, indicating a renewed vitality for small towns. Regional trends show rural towns in northern Illinois less likely to grow in the 1970's than in the 1950's, those in western and southern Illinois more likely to grow in the 1970's, and those in central Illinois equally likely to grow in all three decades. Six illustrative tables and four figures accompany the text and provide comparisons for 1950-60, 1960-70, and 1970-80. (LFL)

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ILLINOIS CRD Report

Number 11 August 1985 Andrew J. Sofranko, Editor Gili Sherman, Technical Editor

Three Decades of Rural Community Growth and Decline

Andrew J. Sofranko, Mark Flotow and J. C. van Es

Illinois is blessed with small, rural communities, many of which are known only by their quaint names or as places on the map. The state ranks near the top of the nation in numbers of small places, and the Midwest, as a region, leads the nation with close to 6,000 rural communities. It is no historical accident that there are so many rural towns dotting the landscape. In part, they stem from a "grass-roots" desire to keep government small and more responsive to the public, and to maintain a feeling of community among residents. Many other rural communities are the result of numerous speculative ventures and population expansion. Whatever their origins and names, small rural communities arose in large measure to serve the hundreds of thousands of farmers scattered throughout the state. When agriculture was made up of small family farms it was inevitable that communities would spring up to meet the needs of farm families. These days the rural community tied solely to agriculture is quickly becoming extinct, if it still exists.

The plight of many small communities is well known. Technological change in agriculture, the introduction of automobiles, and somewhat later a well developed road system, have rendered obsolete many of the functions rural communities typically performed. At the same time, cities were exerting a pull on the residents of rural areas, and for the better part of the past five decades there has been a steady stream of migrants going off to work or to get educated in the bigger cities of the state and region. For a large part of the history of Illinois, rural communities have not fared well; for many decline has been the order of the day.

It's not true, however, that all rural communities have declined, been depleted or "left behind", as some described it. Some have grown because of their location near a city or larger town, near good transportation, or in an attractive, scenic area of the state. In fact, over the years many rural communities have grown so quickly they have become cities and larger urban towns. Countless other rural communities have held their own over the years because of state and local efforts to bring in new employment and improve the types of services and facilities people have come to accept as part of everyday life.

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This report is about the small, rural communities in Illinois and what has been happening to them over the last three decades. It looks at growth and decline, as well as some of the factors which have been responsible for growth and decline. The Report uses census data from the last three censuses for those communities defined as *rural* (less than 2,500 residents).

How Many Rural Communities Are There?

Overall, there are 895 rural communities in Illinois, ten less than 30 years ago. Contrary to popular perceptions, few if any, rural communities have "died out". It's more likely that they have become urban. The number of rural communities in Illinois counties is quite variable. Some, such as DuPage, Boone, and Massac have very few rural communities, 2 each. Others like Sangamon, Iroquois, and Champaign have 20 or more. Another way of looking at rural communities is in terms of how dominant they are in counties. While rural communities make up close to 70 percent of all the places in Illinois, in a dozen counties all the communities are rural. In several others less than half of all places are rural. Individual county level data showing these figures for the past three decades are presented in Table 1.

The number of rural communities has fluctuated slightly from decade to decade. Much of this has been caused by the incorporation of formerly unincorporated settlements, by the creation of new communities, and from several communities slipping from "urban" to "rural" (e.g. Petersburg) and vice versa over the past three decades. To illustrate these shifts, during the 30-year period, 80 rural communities (e.g. Mokena, Bartlett, Glenn Carbon) have grown to the point where they are no longer defined as rural by the Census Bureau, and 35 other rural communities (e.g. Bolingbrook, Sunnyside, Sherman) did not officially exist in 1950.

Close to 70 percent of all towns in Illinois are defined by the Census Bureau as being "rural" (see Figure 1). The vast majority of the population, however, lives in urban towns, as can be seen in Figure 2. Only 7 percent or so of the people in the state live in small rural communities. The state has been, and continues to be, a highly urbanized state, even more urbanized than the nation as a whole.

Table 1. Number of Rural Communities in Illinois Counties, and Percent of Towns That Are Rural for 1980

County	Number of Towns Rural 1950	1960	1970	1980	Percent of Towns Rural, 1980
Adams	11	11	13	13	93
Alexander	2	2	2	3	75
Bond	6	6	6	6	85
Boone	2	2	2	2	67
Brown	4	4	4	4	100
Bureau	20	21	21	21	91
Calhoun	5	5	5	5	100
Carroll	6	6	6	6	86
Cass	4	4	4	4	80
Champaign	15	19	19	21	88
Christian	11	11	11	11	85
Clark	2	2	2	2	50
Clay	5	5	5	5	83
Clinton	8	10	10	10	77
Coles	4	4	4	4	67
Cook	38	22	12	8	7
Crawford	5	5	5	5	83
Cumberland	4	4	4	4	100
DeKalb	9	9	8	8	75
DeWitt	6	6	6	6	86
Douglas	7	7	6	5	63
DuPage	7	10	4	2	7
Edgar	6	6	6	7	88
Edwards	4	4	4	4	100
Effingham	9	9	9	9	90
Fayette	6	6	6	6	86
Ford	7	7	7	7	78
Franklin	12	13	13	13	81
Fulton	16	17	17	17	85
Gallatin	6	7	7	7	100
Greene	8	7	7	7	78
Grundy	12	11	11	11	85
Hamilton	4	4	4	4	80
Hancock	14	14	13	13	87
Hardin	3	3	3	3	100
Henderson	7	8	8	8	100
Henry	11	11	11	11	73
Iroquois	20	20	20	20	95
Jackson	9	9	9	9	82
Jasper	6	6	6	6	86
Jefferson	8	8	8	8	89
Jersey	5	5	5	5	83
JoDaviess	9	9	9	9	90
Johnson	7	7	7	7	100
Kane	12	12	9	9	45
Kankakee	12	11	10	11	69
Kendall	6	5	5	3	43
Knox	11	11	11	11	79
Lake	14	22	21	27	50
LaSalle	16	16	16	16	70
Lawrence	5	5	5	5	83
Lee	11	11	11	11	92
Livingston	12	11	11	12	80
Logan	9	9	9	9	90
McDonough	8	8	8	8	80
McHenry	10	19	12	16	59
McLean	17	19	19	18	86
Macon	7	9	10	9	82
Macoupin	21	21	21	22	85
Madison	14	14	16	15	52
Marion	12	12	12	12	86
Marshall	7	7	6	6	86
Mason	8	8	7	7	78
Massac	2	2	2	2	67
Menard	5	5	4	5	100
Mercer	8	9	9	9	90
Monroe	5	4	4	4	67
Montgomery	16	18	17	17	85
Morgan	9	9	8	8	80
Moultrie	5	5	5	5	83
Ogle	7	7	7	8	67
Peoria	8	10	10	10	63
Perry	4	4	4	4	67
Piatt	2	7	7	7	88
Pike	16	17	17	17	94
Pope	3	3	3	3	100
Pulaski	7	7	7	7	100
Putnam	5	6	6	6	100
Randolph	12	12	11	11	79
Richland	4	4	4	4	80
Rock Island	9	10	9	9	60
St. Clair	19	15	14	13	45
Saline	3	4	4	4	50
Sangamon	21	24	22	20	80
Schuyler	3	3	3	3	75
Scott	7	7	7	2	100
Shelby	10	10	10	10	91
Stark	4	4	4	4	100
Stephenson	10	10	10	10	91
Tazewell	10	10	10	10	63
Union	5	5	5	5	83
Vermilion	17	16	16	19	83
Wabash	3	3	3	3	75
Warren	4	4	4	4	80
Washington	11	10	10	11	92
Wayne	6	7	7	8	89
White	8	8	8	8	89
Whiteside	8	8	8	8	67
Will	15	14	14	8	32
Williamson	11	11	11	11	73
Winnebago	5	6	7	7	64
Woodford	11	12	14	13	87
Illinois	905	921	893	895	64

Explanations For Growth and Decline

Over the years, many attempts have been made to explain why communities grow and decline, or why some rural communities continue to grow and attract residents while other communities nearly identical in size decline or remain stable. Several factors have been credited with contributing to growth and decline. First, proximity to larger urban centers; it has been observed that small communities can "borrow" some of the advantages or amenities associated to urban living, if they are located near a larger town. A second factor is access to good transportation which permits people to travel out for jobs and many of the goods and services they desire, but which aren't provided in the rural community; good transportation has also served as an inducement to firms creating new jobs in rural areas. Finally, it has been argued that some communities grow because they have a more dynamic and progressive leadership which encourages growth and improvement in community life. It's impossible to determine if differences in leadership, which undoubtedly exist, have had an effect on community growth and decline over the years. It's one of those things that are hard to measure. Here we will look primarily at how access to transportation and urban proximity have affected rural communities over time.

Table 2
Growth of Rural Communities in Counties With Different Size Urban Centers, 1950-1980

Size of Largest Town in County	Rural Communities Growing		
	1950-1960	1960-1970	1970-1980
	%	%	%
25,000 and over	84	85	68
10,000 to 24,999	55	65	78
2,500 to 9,999	50	61	73
less than 2,500	50	58	72

Effect of Urban Centers on Rural Growth

There are different ways of looking at how proximity to urban centers affects rural community growth and decline. The first is by looking at population trends for those rural communities located in counties with different size urban places; the second way of looking at the effects of proximity on growth and decline is by comparing trends for rural communities that vary in terms of distance from a large metropolitan center (of 50,000 or more people). The first approach looks at what effects different size urban places in the county have on rural communities, while the latter approach examines the effects of proximity to SMSA (metropolitan) centers, whether in the same county as the rural communities or not.

The data in Table 2 show that the presence of a larger urban town in a county has generally had an effect on rural community growth, but that effect has virtually disappeared over time. If we look at the 1950-60 decade, for example, we see that 84 percent of the rural communities located in counties with a city of 25,000 or more grew. In counties where the largest town had less than 10,000 people, only half of the rural communities grew. This type of evidence, for both the 1950-60 and 1960-70 decades, shows a definite relationship between the presence of a sizeable urban center in the county and rural community growth. There is also evidence, as seen in Table 2, of a relationship between the size of the largest town and rural community growth, with progressively higher percentages of growth as one goes up the size-of-largest-place hierarchy. Between 1970 and 1980, however, a decade characterized by rural growth and a population turnaround, a limited reversal has occurred. More rural communities grew between 1970 and 1980 than in either of the two previous decades. Seventy-two percent of the rural communities in totally rural counties (no town over 2,500) grew, considerably more than in either of the two previous decades, and more than in counties with cities of 25,000 or more – the real growth centers of the two previous decades. While one can argue that the presence of an urban town in a county at one time had an effect on whether rural communities grew or not, in the most recent decade rural community growth was not tied to the presence of a large town in the county.

A further illustration of how town growth has changed over time can be seen in Table 3. In the early decades, 1950-60 and 1960-70, urban towns were clearly the growth points in the state. The lowest levels of growth were in the rural communities, 60 percent of which grew between 1950-1960. It's true that the majority grew, but the 60 percent figure was quite a bit under the growth in any of the other larger-size towns. An almost identical pattern is seen for 1960-70, but with a larger percentage of the rural communities growing. In the most recent decade, however, it was only the rural communities that continued to increase their percentages growing. The larger towns, particularly those of 25,000 and over, had a much smaller percentage growing than in previous decades. Only about half of the towns over 10,000 grew in the past decade, compared with over 80 percent in each of the two previous decades. This can be taken as evidence of a renewed vitality in the small rural communities of the state.

Table 3
Growth in Illinois Towns, 1950-1980

Size of Town	Percent Growing		
	1950-60	1960-70	1970-80
25,000 and over	81	83	40
10,000 to 24,999	85	89	51
2,500 to 9,999	84	84	74
less than 2,500	60	68	75

Proximity to a Metropolitan Center

Another way of looking at the effect of large urban centers on community growth is in terms of growth in rural communities located at various distances from a metropolitan center, regardless of county lines. In the earlier decade, 1950-60, there was a well-defined gradient with community growth occurring primarily in rural communities that were less than 25 miles from a metropolitan center (Table 4). Less than 30 percent of the rural communities falling more than 50 miles from a metropolitan center grew. The most recent data, for 1970-80, shows a similar gradient but close proximity now has much less effect on growth than in either of the two earlier decades. This is rather clear evidence that rural community growth is taking place independently of location. The preference of many in this country for rural community living in close proximity to a city is apparently still being realized, but so too is the desire on the part of many people to locate away from the influence of a city.

Figure 1: Distribution of Different Size Places in Illinois, 1980

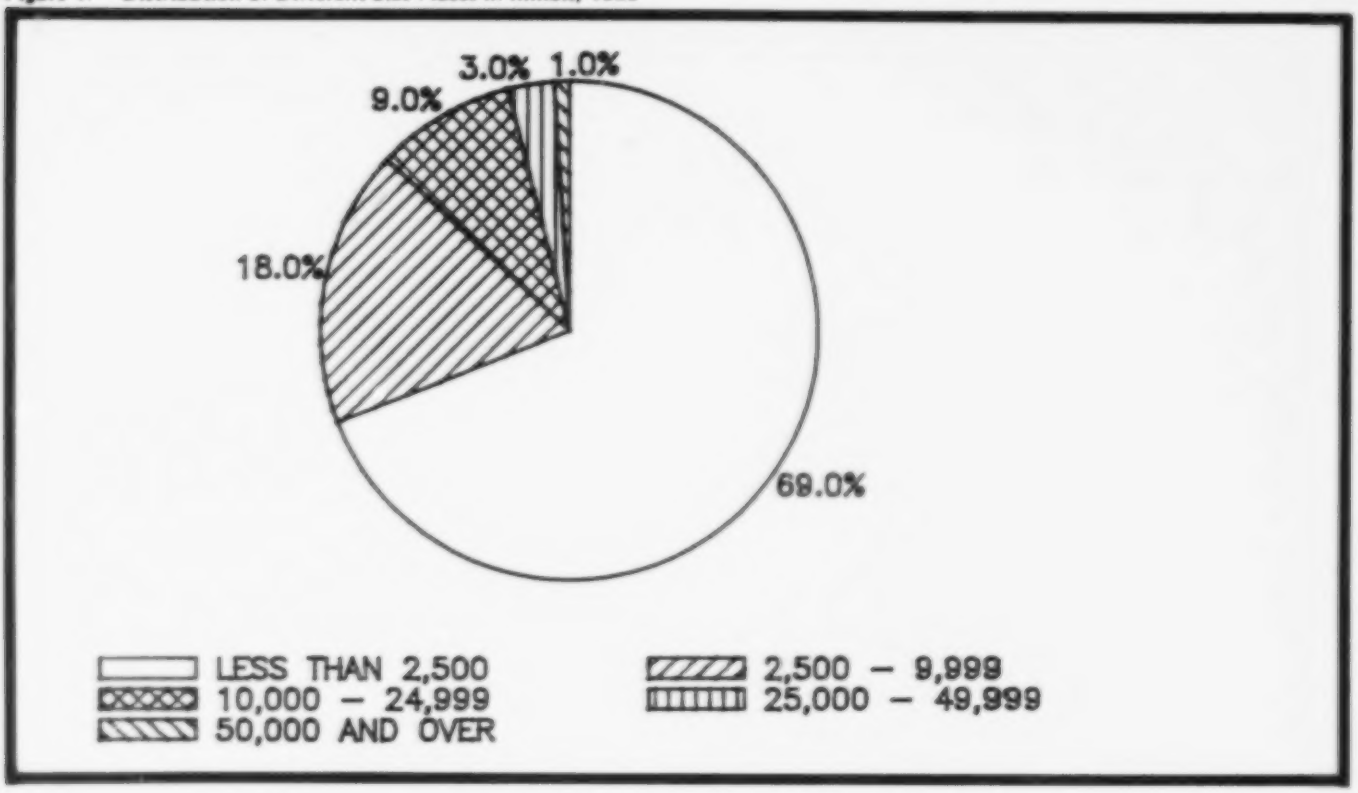

Figure 2: Distribution of Population in Different Size Places, 1980

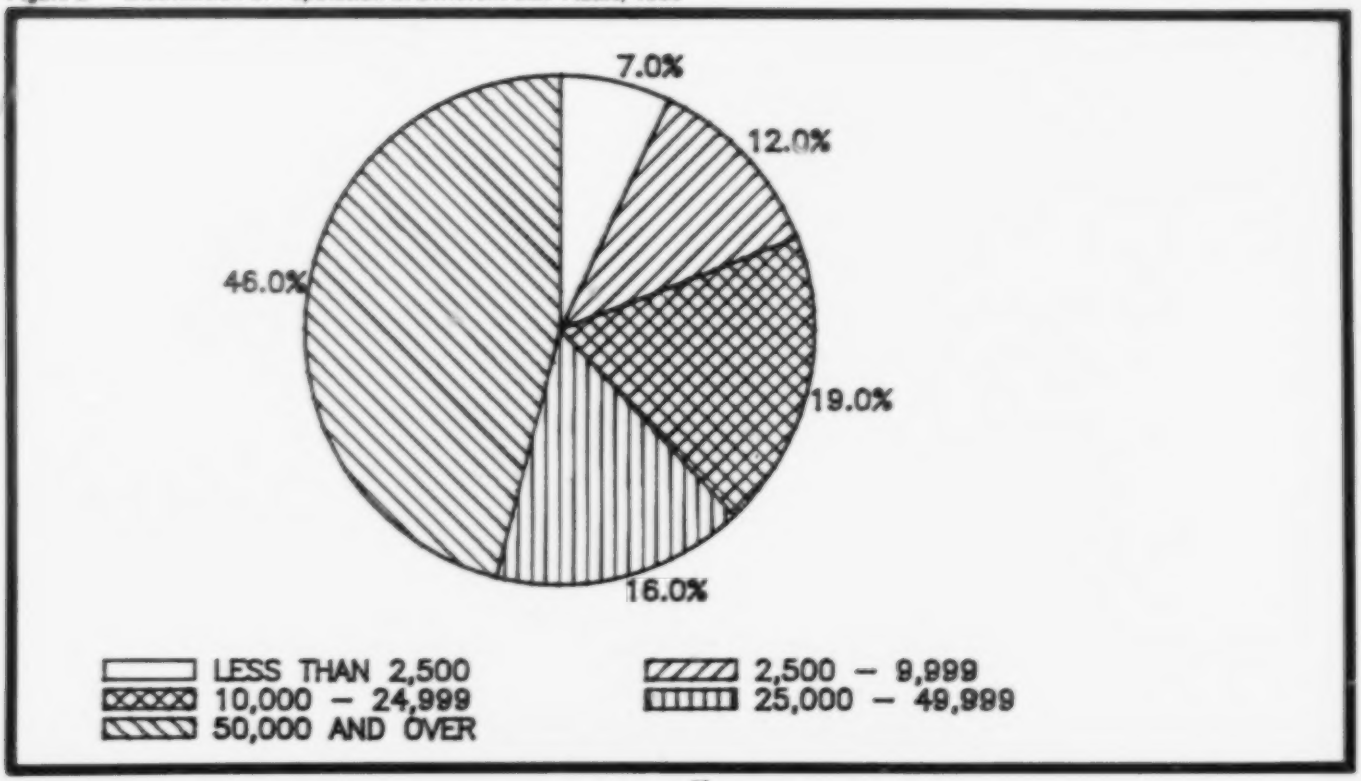

Table 4
Three Decades of Growth in Rural Communities, by Distance From a Metropolitan Center

Distance From Metropolitan Center	Percent Growing		
	1950-60	1960-70	1970-80
Less than 25 miles	83	82	76
25 to 50 miles	64	69	73
Over 50 miles	28	51	68

Influence of Interstate Proximity

Location near an interstate has had an effect on rural community growth over the years, and in fact on the growth of towns of all sizes (Table 5). The effect, however, has diminished over time as more and more communities gained access to an interstate. In the 1950-60 decade, only 41 rural communities were on an interstate; 88 percent of them grew compared to 57 percent growth among those not on the interstate. Between 1960 and 1970, the number of rural communities on an interstate grew to 168, with nearly three-fourths (74 percent) growing. Finally, between 1970-80 a total of 238 rural communities were on an interstate. Eighty percent of them grew in that decade, compared with 70 percent among those not on the interstate. A very similar pattern exists if one looks at growth for all towns that were on or off an interstate: differences exist for all decades, but the effects become minor after the first decade. There is a possible explanation for what has occurred. It's possible that in the initial decade, the interstates were completed in or near communities that were already growing. It is also likely that interstates did in fact affect growth. After all, there is a difference in growth between those on and off an interstate, and the difference has persisted. The number of towns with access to interstates for each decade are shown in Figure 3.

The evidence so far suggests that rural community growth is influenced by proximity to an interstate and/or to a larger metropolitan center. This raises the question of which is the more important influence. The relative effects of proximity to an SMSA and proximity to an interstate on small town growth are clearly seen in Figure 4. In this figure, two dichotomous variables are contrasted: growth of small towns 1) inside of a metropolitan or nonmetropolitan county, and 2) location "on" (within 5 miles of) an interstate sometime between 1950 and 1980, or "never on" an interstate during the same period (excluding Cook county). Growth is greater, in all three decades, for the rural communities in metropolitan areas than for those in the nonmetropolitan. Within these two broad categories being on an interstate makes a slight difference, and in each decade. A second point worth noting is that in both types of metropolitan communities there is a decreasing growth rate over time, whereas the opposite is the case for the nonmetropolitan communities. Proximity to a metropolitan area is thus seen to have more of an effect on growth than proximity to an interstate, but the nonmetropolitan communities are demonstrating a steady increase in growth.

Figure 3: Towns Gaining Access to Interstate Highways, 1950-1980

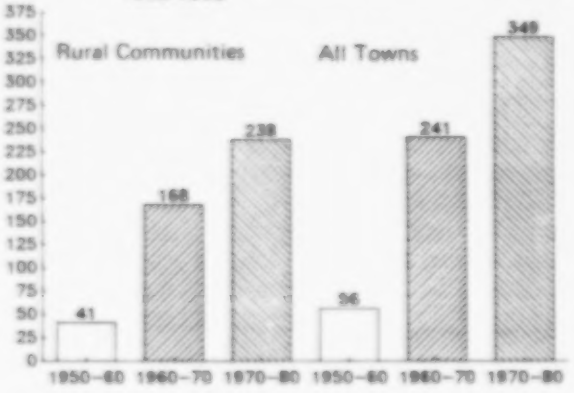

Table 5
Growth in Rural Communities, and All Towns, By Proximity to an Interstate, 1950-1980

	Rural Communities Growing			All Towns		
	1950-60	1960-70	1970-80	1950-60	1960-70	1970-80
	%	%	%	%	%	%
On Interstate	88	74	80	91	77	75
Off Interstate	57	66	70	61	68	71

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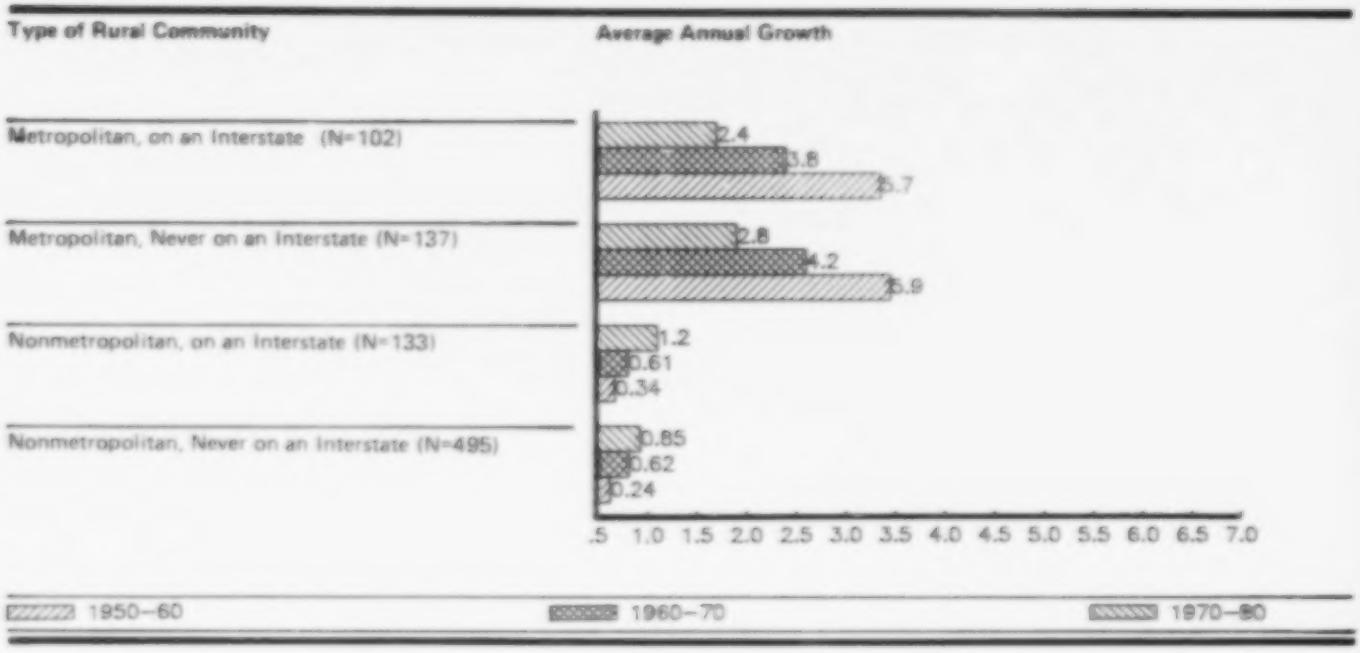
Figure 4: Average Annual Percent Growth for Rural Communities Varying on Proximity to Metropolitan Areas and Interstates



Regional Trends

The trends in rural community growth across different regions of the state illustrate a dramatic turnaround over the last 30 years. The overall trend, displayed in Figure 4, is for growth in larger proportions of rural communities in the state. Between 1950 and 1960, 60 percent of the rural communities grew, and in the most recent decade, 73 percent. On a regional basis, however, the most striking pattern has been in southern Illinois where in the 1950-60 period only slightly more than a third grew while in 1970-80, 78 percent grew. In this latter decade, this is a higher figure than in any other region of the state. A similar, but less dramatic, change has also occurred in the western portion of the state. Only in the northern region has there been a slight decrease over what it was in earlier decades.

In earlier CRD reports information has been provided about migration and population redistribution in Illinois and the impact of growth on small communities. The experience of the last decade indicates a reversal in trends and the potential of a lasting revitalization of many small communities in Illinois.

Table 6
Rural Community Growth, by Region

Region	Percent Growing		
	1950-60	1960-70	1970-80
Northern	85(245)	82(243)	74(219)
Western	50(181)	65(185)	70(184)
Central	68(265)	71(279)	70(276)
Southern	35(214)	52(214)	78(214)
Total	60 (905)	68 (921)	73 (893)

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Summary

1. According to the U.S. Census, there are approximately 900 rural towns in Illinois. A town is defined as *rural* if it has fewer than 2,500 inhabitants.
2. All Illinois counties have some towns defined as rural; 14 counties have only rural towns.
3. When compared to larger towns, a reversal of growth patterns has taken place over the last three decades. During the 50's, fewer rural towns grew than the towns in other size classes. During the 70's, many more rural towns grew, while among the towns with more than 10,000 inhabitants the proportion growing has been sharply reduced.
4. In the 50's, the growth of rural towns was strongly related to the level of urbanization of the county. In the 70's, the number of growing rural towns is approximately equal in Illinois counties, regardless of the size of the largest city in the county.
5. During all three decades the probability of rural towns growing is inversely related to their distance to metropolitan centers. While the inverse relationship between distance and probability of growth was quite strong in the 50's, it has weakened significantly since then.
6. During the three decades the probability of rural towns growing is related to their location on interstate highways, but that relationship was considerably stronger in the 50's than it was in the 70's.
7. Comparing the effects of proximity to an interstate with proximity to a metropolitan center, the evidence shows that the latter is much more important to rural community growth.
8. In the northern region of the state, rural towns were *less* likely to grow in the 70's than in the 50's. In the western and southern parts of the state, rural towns are much *more* likely to grow in the 70's than in the 50's. Rural towns in the central part were equally likely to grow in all three decades.

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